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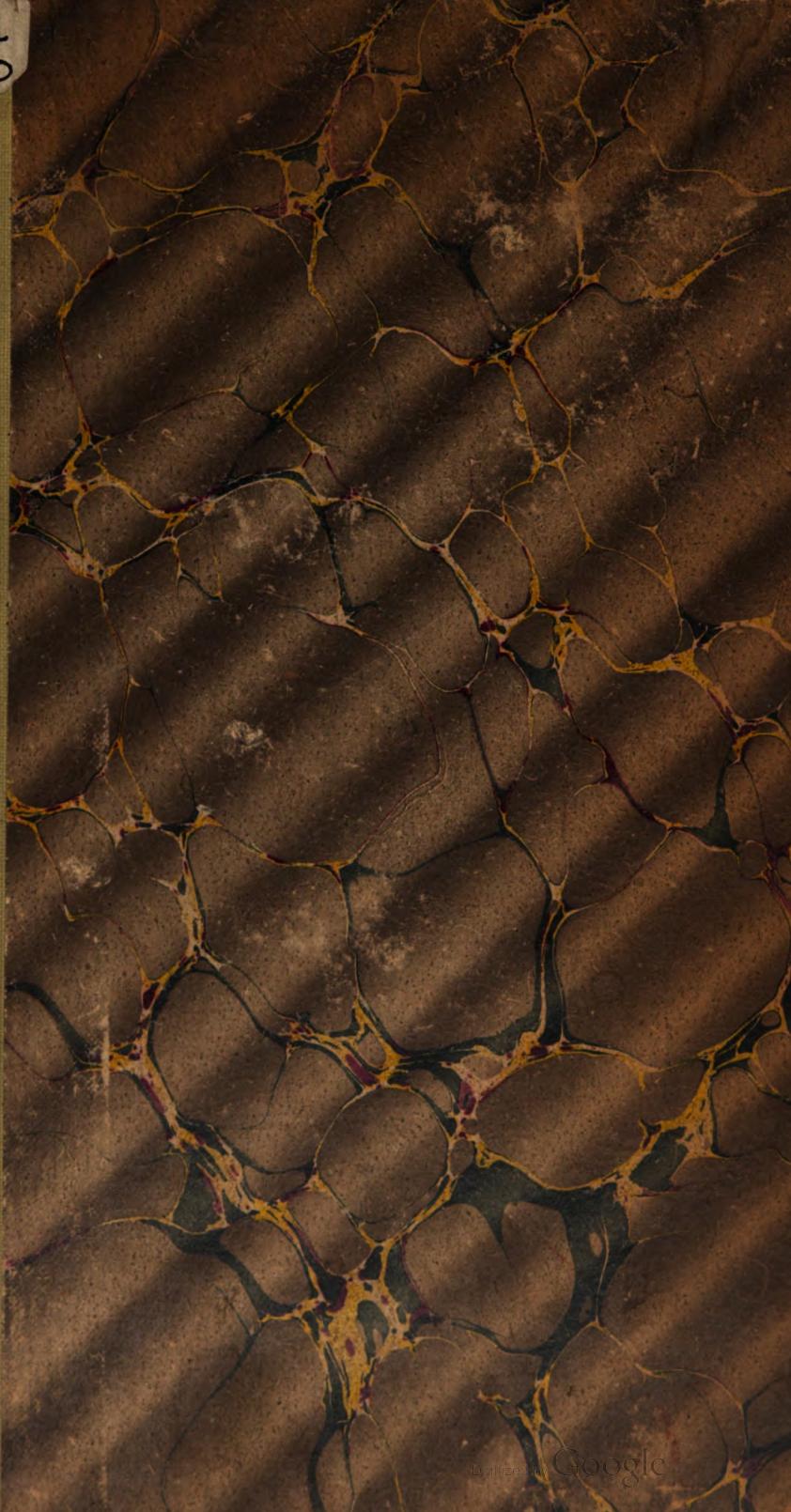
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Sketches of the Lives of

Sybil Jones

and

Rebecca Collins

BY

FRANCES ANNE BUDGE.

SKETCHES OF THE LIVES
OF
SYBIL JONES
AND
REBECCA COLLINS,

BY

FRANCES ANNE BUDGE,

AUTHOR OF "ISAAC SHARP, AN APOSTLE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY";
"STORY OF GEORGE FOX AND SOME EARLY FRIENDS";
"STEPHEN GRELLET, A MISSIONARY LIFE"; "ANNALS OF THE EARLY FRIENDS";
"THOMAS SHILLITOE, SHOEMAKER AND MINISTER," ETC.

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M

SYBIL JONES.

THE wife of a New England farmer, milking her own cows, careful in her expenditure, accurate in her accounts, emphatically a good wife and a good mother, none the less did Sybil Jones realize her call to be a messenger of the Lord, when, and where, and as He pleased.

Her graceful yet most dignified bearing, the sweetness of her expression, her musical voice, the unstudied beauty of her language, her yearning sympathy and tender love, all attracted the hearer. She ever sought to speak under the prompting and in the power of the Spirit of God, and her "words of eloquence were made words of life to souls." "One thing I do" might have been her motto, for the aim of her life was to walk in the way of holiness and to guide all wandering and wayward steps into the same path.

"Her children underneath her native skies,
Rise in the North, the South, the East, the West,
In Europe, Asia, Africa they rise,
Her sons and daughters, and pronounce her blest."

Extreme timidity and sensitiveness, increased by great delicacy of health, made her fearlessness when following

the call of duty the more striking, but to her faith such a call was emphatically the call of the Lord. "I am the King's daughter," she would sometimes say, "the gold and silver are mine and the cattle upon a thousand hills." Yet at times her faith was sorely tried, but it seemed only to grow the stronger for the strain.

Sybil Jones was born at Brunswick in Maine. Her maiden, as well as her married name, was Jones. She was descended from Governor Dudley, one of the pilgrims to New England, who is said to have been of the lineage of the Earls of Leicester. It may be that to this she owed her queenly bearing and gracefulness. Most of her early life was spent at Augusta, and she regarded that town as her spiritual birthplace. A Methodist minister who resided there was a great help to her seeking soul.

In her seventeenth year she became a teacher in a school, where for a short time she had been a very studious pupil and a great favourite with her school-fellows. Her parents and herself were members of the Society of Friends, and one day her father came to the school to take her to one of the district meetings. In this meeting a minister was led to speak of what he believed to be the state of mind of someone present, and to point out in words which proved prophetic what would be the future course of such an one if faithful to the promptings and guidance of the Spirit of God.

At the age of twenty-five she became the wife of Eli Jones, a remarkable man and minister, and thus began a long and true union of heart and service. With diligent regularity they drove the three miles through

the woods which lay between the farm and the Friends' Meeting-house, where their own voices were often heard by a sympathetic audience. Their names were early enrolled among the ministers of the Society. Meanwhile amidst

“The daily round, the common task,”

their heavenly Master was training them for His service, as vessels “unto honour, sanctified and meet” for His use.

Sybil Jones's first mission was undertaken at the age of thirty-two accompanied by her husband. It was to the provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and often the good seed fell into good ground ; a tavern-keeper lovingly reasoned with gave up the sale of intoxicants. Elsewhere a young man who had heard that a lady was going to preach, said he would go to hear what “the heretic” had to say. Sybil Jones's sermon was as a revelation to him, and the whole course of his life became changed. The hardships encountered in travelling were not light, nor could it have been a pleasant thing to be met in a great wood by a huge bear.

When on another mission, they were for five days on the Ohio River and had a blessed meeting with the passengers. Sybil Jones writes : “The first part of the passage I noticed some playing at cards, which brought me under great exercise of mind, and after carefully examining the subject, I thought it my duty before retiring to rest to walk to the table and express my feelings. Asking leave of them I proceeded to relieve

my mind, which was received kindly and I saw no more card-playing afterwards. I felt great peace in taking up this cross."

Her visits to the Southern States drew out her heart's deep sympathy for the African race, and ere long to her inward ear came a call to visit the negro colony of Liberia. It was no light thing for a delicate woman, even with her husband's tender care, to take a voyage in a sailing packet to the west coast of Africa with rough passengers and a coarse crew, leaving five children behind her. Can we wonder that she waited long to be sure of what was indeed the Lord's will. Her father's life, moreover, was drawing to a close, and a brother was in a very critical state of health ;—

“ If I falter, if my heart be tempted by its doubts and fears,
 If my eyes, to heaven uplifted, see Thee only through their
 tears ;
 If the clinging of love's tendrils bind my thoughts to things of
 earth,
 And between me and my duty come the dreams of home and
 hearth,—
 Oh have pity on me, Father, and if I should go astray,
 Let Thy angels, Faith and Patience, point me to the narrow
 way.”

And God had not forgotten to be gracious. Soon the heavenly summons for her father came ; but not before he had told her that he had been thinking the Lord had service for her in a distant land, though as yet she had not spoken of this to any one. The old man placed his hands on her, bade her be faithful, and poured out a fervent prayer on her behalf. “ It was a

solemn scene," she says, "for the painful and yet happy thought mingled in this communion that, when my frail bark must venture on dangerous seas, his would be for ever anchored on the shore of immortal joy." Her brother also spoke of his belief that work for the Master was awaiting her across the ocean.

Probably wide service in Europe was already looming before her mental sight, and whilst her brother's words seemed another token of the Lord's will, so deep was her sense of unfitness for this duty that she could not bring herself to believe that she could be chosen for it. And so she thought within herself that unless someone "clothed with Gospel authority" told her that this was indeed the call of the Lord and that *He would fit her for it*, she would not take a single step forward. "In thinking over this class," she adds, "I selected Benjamin Seebohm, who I knew was then somewhere in America." Sybil Jones's health was now so frail that she went out but little, but when the day for a district meeting came there came also an irresistible constraint to go to it.

Almost the first person she saw was Benjamin Seebohm. The meeting gathered under a great solemnity. Sybil Jones writes: "It seemed to me that this weighty service fell upon it, and after a time of very solemn silence, Benjamin Seebohm arose and took up an individual case, and so exactly described my feelings and the service, that no doubt remained but that the Most High had sent him with this message to me. He spoke most cheerfully, explained feelings of spiritual poverty as preparatory to this work, that the

creature may be laid low in the dust and the blessed Name alone be magnified ; said the Lord would abundantly furnish for every good word and work ; that He reduced the creature that all dependence on self might be removed and our confidence firmly fixed on Him."

When she told her two eldest children of what lay before her, the answer of each, though given out of a full heart, was, "Go Mother," and as she sat by the baby's cradle her son took up a hymn-book and read aloud the hymn, "Forward and fear not." A little daughter, aged three and a half, would often look at her and say, "Don't leave me mother, I will be a nice little lady." Sybil Jones felt that she could not have left them had it not been for the gentle voice of a loving Saviour, saying, "It is I, be not afraid. Leave thy children with Me." All possible arrangements for the good of the children were made, before Eli and Sybil Jones crossed the Atlantic to Liberia.

After a time at home Eli and Sybil Jones started on their mission to England, Scotland, Ireland, and some parts of the European Continent. They attended the sessions of the Friends' Yearly Meeting in London. A gentleman present at one of the meetings thus describes Sybil Jones : "She arose calm, meek, and graceful. The burden of her spirit was the life of religion in the heart, as contrasted with its mere language on the tongue, or what it was to be really and truly a disciple of Jesus Christ. More than 1,000 persons seemed to hold their breath, as they listened to that meek, delicate woman whose lips appeared to be touched with an utterance almost divine."

Wherever she went, the Lord seemed to go before her. In one town a clergyman, who had been present at one of their meetings, asked Eli and Sybil Jones to his residence and entered heartily into their plans. Again and again Sybil Jones was laid aside by illness. A doctor whom she consulted at Liverpool kindly reminded her that when David had it in his heart to build the Lord a house, the will was taken for the deed, and added : "You must stop your work and go south, or go home at once." Doubtless in some cases disregard to such professional advice might be presumptuous, but in Sybil Jones's it was not so. The voice of the Lord called her to Norway, and to Norway she went, and afterwards to Germany, Switzerland, and France.

In 1860, when the terrible civil war broke out in America, while Eli and Sybil Jones mourned over the sorrows of parents whose sons were going forth to the war, they had little thought that their own eldest son would resolve to volunteer. We cannot measure the greatness of this trial, unless we bear in mind that all war is contrary to the commandments of Christ.

Eight years later we heard Sybil Jones tell the touching story, and speak of how her husband and herself would pace the room, unable to sleep in the bitterness of their sorrow. Young Major Jones was killed near Washington, struck by a ball from a sharp-shooter.

Thenceforth a soldier's uniform was a passport to Sybil Jones's heart, and as the months went by, she told the story of a Saviour's love in hospitals and elsewhere to 30,000 soldiers. In one hospital the doctor in charge

said he never allowed a service in a ward where the patients were badly wounded or dying, but when Sybil Jones said "Our services never disturb," he gave his consent, and the Gospel message seemed as water to thirsty souls. In another hospital she found a soldier who had served under Major Jones, and who spoke in the warmest terms of his unspotted character and of his kindness to the men.

After the assassination of President Lincoln, Sybil Jones visited his widow, and writes : "All crushed and broken under the heavy stroke, I spoke to her of the Heavenly Chastener's love and care ; said that He could bind up the broken heart and give peace. She cordially invited me to come again."

Sybil Jones also believed it to be her duty to seek for a religious interview with President Johnson, who courteously gave permission. Faithfully she urged him to "rely on the Ruler of the universe for counsel in guiding the helm of State." She told him that her message was from the King of Kings, and he gravely thanked her, whilst many who were present were in tears. The President's little granddaughter offered her a beautiful bouquet, and Sybil Jones drew the child to her and spoke of the infinitely more beautiful things of heaven.

At a rather later date Sybil Jones visited the prisons in some of the Southern States. Before the conclusion of these arduous labours of love in her own land, Sybil Jones had heard the summons to more distant service. "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, unto a land that I will show thee," were words which

often came with power to her heart as a call to cross the Atlantic again. Of this call the church did not doubt the reality, and with its prayerful sympathy furnished her with the needful certificates. A lady who was present at the meeting where this was done writes : " Sybil Jones arose with the most beautiful and heavenly expression of countenance, her whole soul filled with the engrossing subject, and with a grace of manner of which she was entirely unconscious, told us in beautiful and touching language what she felt called to do in the service of her Lord, gratefully acknowledging His many mercies thus far in her journey of life, and her unshaken confidence and trust in Him for all that was to come."

It was in 1867 that Eli and Sybil Jones set sail for Europe where much blessing rested on their work. There are hearts which still cherish hallowed memories of Sybil Jones. We recall her words, manifestly the outcome of her own experience, " It is a blessed thing to love Christ supremely." And our thoughts go back to a drawing-room meeting for young people held by Eli and Sybil Jones on a beautiful summer evening, when a remarkable outpouring of the Spirit was felt.

There was a child-like simplicity about Sybil Jones which was very attractive. On leaving a house where her husband and herself had been entertained for some days, she said to the young people, whose love she had won : " If any little service for the Lord arises, do it, and do not reason about it afterwards. Leave it with Christ and there will be peace." In a meeting for young women we remember her saying : " When a soul

places itself in the Lord's hands and says, 'Lord, here am I, seal me for Thy service on earth and for Thy courts above,'—shall I tell you what He does? He takes that soul in His arms."

Some time was spent by Eli and Sybil Jones in Syria, and to the close of her life she loved to think of the eastern children's words, "We thank you for telling us about Jesus." The "gilded cages" of harems opened their doors to her, and to ears that had never heard it before, she told the story of the cross. The poet Whittier, in a beautiful little poem addressed to Eli and Sybil Jones, writes :

" Go, Angel guided, duty sent !
 Our thoughts go with you o'er the foam ;
 Where'er you pitch your pilgrim tent,
 Our hearts shall be, and make it home.

 Oh ! blest to teach where Jesus taught,
 And walk with Him Gennesaret's strand !
 But whereso'er His work is wrought,
 Dear hearts, shall be your Holy Land."

Laid aside by a very critical illness, Sybil Jones said to a caller : "I am stranded, but Oh ! beside such still waters, such a calm. There has been a great tempest, physically, but such sweet peace, not a ripple. It seemed as if I lay there waiting, but the boat did not come ! I feel as if I must bear testimony to every one of the all-sufficiency of the religion of Christ to keep the soul in perfect peace in such extremity as I have been in. One day it seemed as if there were only one slender thread of life left, which the smallest thing could sever, and I should have been

in glory." And then she spoke of how the wish to get back to her "precious children," who seemed to think they could not live longer without her, had made her over-tax her strength, by not allowing herself the intervals of rest which her fragile health demanded.

A note she then had, of which the writer happens to have a copy, is as follows :

"It is not without some hesitation that I offer thee the accompanying leaflets and this note, and yet possibly they may be a cup of cold water such as God sometimes sees fit to turn into wine. How graciously He has condescended to answer unnumbered prayers in thus far restoring thee to health.

"My thoughts have been with you, whilst I earnestly desired that if it were His righteous will, Christ would raise thee up again for His sake and the gospel's—and for the sake of Eli Jones and your children. I think that God whilst calling you away from your home, and making you both so great a blessing to the children of other people, will surely take good care of your own. May He give you 'your life for a prey in all places whither you go.' I asked Jesus to be in thy chamber feeding thee with the 'finest of the wheat.'

"Will it be presumption for such an one as I, to say in the beautiful words of Catherine Phillips, that 'I trust you will ever be near to my life in that holy bond which neither time nor death can dissolve'? . . . In both meetings I think Christ gave thee words for me amongst others present. Young as I was, *how* true I felt the remark, 'There is a vacuum within thy heart which nothing but the constraining love of Christ can fill.'"

Before starting on one of her long journeys, her heart was cheered when that veteran apostle, Stephen Grellet, who had "given messages from the King of Kings to potentates and princes in all the countries of Europe," thus addressed her husband and herself : "The Lord has provided for your children, and thus given striking demonstration of His love to you. And now these words are applicable to you, my dear friends, 'I will be with thee whithersoever thou goest, and will guide thee with mine eye, and afterward receive thee into glory.'" And as one of her friends wrote :

"Bearing up His ark of promise, she the weak became the strong,
 In her heart a hymn of praising, on her lips a triumph song :
 'Thou hast vanquished, O my Saviour, Thou who bore my sins
 for me ;
 Sanctify with Thy anointing sacrifices made for Thee.
 As of old Thou ledst Thy children, showing them the cloud by
 day,
 And by night the fiery pillar, so lead me along the way.'"

And truly to those who were familiar with her work it did seem that the Lord sanctified it with His anointing ; and to Him she gave the glory. She lived very near to Him, and the spiritual insight of her ministry, which often closely adapted itself to the needs of those who were strangers to her, was sometimes very remarkable.

In the summer of 1869, Eli and Sybil Jones returned to their native land and beloved children. "She loved to live," writes a relative, "for every day gave her one more chance to call to the unhappy to be made happy."

To the very last she pleaded, "I beseech you in Christ's stead." She died in 1873 at the age of sixty-five. One who was present at the funeral writes : "All hearts were moved as our venerable friend Eli Jones arose, controlling the feelings of a heart filled with sorrow, and told of the manifestation of divine power that had attended her mission while they travelled in foreign lands ; speaking also of the blessing following her labours during the past few months in attending some one hundred and forty meetings, principally in her own State, in which she appeared like a reaper gathering the harvest." Another of the friends of Sybil Jones writes :

" Oh for a zeal like hers, to never tire !
Oh for a faith like hers, to follow still
The cloud by day, by night the glowing fire
That led her on to do her Father's will ! "

REBECCA COLLINS.

BY the writer's side is a photograph, and, though a little faded with age, the winning smile on the sweet face of an elderly lady is still clearly visible. The simple cap closely fitting the head, as it rests on the smooth silver-sprinkled hair, forms a fitting frame to the gentle face, and with the graceful, indoor shawl, and plainly-made gown, would show to even one who never knew the original of it, that he was looking at the likeness of a member of the Society of Friends, taken many years ago.

Rebecca Collins was an American lady who died not long since at an advanced age. The writer has heard her speak of how, even in early youth, she had learnt from her own experience what a blessed thing it is to work for Christ. Once during her childhood when her only brother was ill, she felt it was laid on her heart to go to his room and offer to read him the fifty-first Psalm. The effort of making this proposal was great, but to her comfort, leave—an ungracious leave—was granted. So great was her emotion at first, that she could hardly give utterance to the words, yet faithfully doing the bidding of her Saviour, His strength did not

fail her, and she read with a pathos which she felt was given her, those wondrous words of penitence and faith. Then, child though she was, she poured out her soul in prayer by her brother's bed-side. From that day he dated his conversion. "I have faith in the efficacy of prayer," she said, "and when my faith has been tried to a hair's breadth, and I have not known what step to take next, the needed help has come in answer to prayer. In some companies I lift up my heart to God, and silently say, 'Lord be round about me ; keep me in the hollow of Thy hand.'"

She spoke also of the duty of caring for the highest interests of our servants, and said that at one house where she was a guest she had prayed at the time of family worship for a little servant-maid. The girl afterwards went to her mistress and said, with tears, "No one ever prayed for me before ! Who was that lady ? Where did she come from ?"

In 1869 Rebecca Collins held a series of meetings among the seamen of New York. In one of these meetings, as she stood a stranger amongst the sailors, she was led to speak to the state of someone present, appealing to him if he had not been in a great storm at sea, threatened every moment with loss of life, with his sins pressing heavily upon him, and if in that time of direst need he had not called upon God and vowed that, if He would spare his life, the captain's, the ship's company, and the ship, he would dedicate the rest of his days to the service of the Lord, and would become a humble follower of Jesus. Did not God answer that prayer ? When she took her seat a noble-looking sea-

man rose and said, "I am the man that the Lord's handmaiden has spoken to. Off the coast of Massachusetts we encountered a terrific storm, threatening to dash the ship upon the rocks, and engulf it in the deep waters." Then, with tears and a full heart, he went on : "I was a sinner, a swearing man, but I knelt in prayer, and promised God that if He would save my life, the ship, and the ship's company, I would become a follower of Christ,—I would serve Him to the end of my days. The Lord heard the prayer of the sinner, and He changed the wind, and drove us out to sea and safety. The captain and several of the crew seeing how signally the Lord had answered my prayer, became converted that night ; their hearts were changed and they have continued devoted Christians. And, blessed be the name of the Lord, I have kept my vow, and will serve Him while He gives me life." There was an intense silence when the sailor ceased speaking, and the overshadowing of the spirit of God was manifestly felt.

Then another sailor knelt and thanked the Lord for sending His handmaiden to preach Christ among them, and fervently pleaded in His name, that He would be with her to the end of her days and bless her labours to winning of souls, wherever He should guide her feet. The pastor spoke of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the meeting, and added, "Now I know that the Lord will bless us this winter, for He has sent these friends to us." At another meeting a seaman spoke of how he had heard "this lady" preaching the glorious gospel of life and salvation to prisoners. He alluded also to William Penn's treaty

with the Indians, the only treaty ever made without an oath, and one that was never broken.

The last of the meetings was held in the Floating Chapel, on the Hudson River. The aged Swedish pastor gave Rebecca Collins and her friends a hearty welcome, saying, "I have just been praying for you and a blessing on this evening's meeting, asking the Lord to pour His Holy Spirit upon you. I give up the whole meeting to you, but as the men are mostly Norwegians, Swedes, and Danes, I may add a few words at the close." He took his seat in the chapel by the side of Rebecca Collins, and covered his face with his hands in silent prayer. After a time of silent waiting on the Lord, Rebecca Collins prayed for the congregation, pleading for the seamen in the name of Him who had sent her to proclaim in that chapel the glad tidings of life and salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. When she rose to speak she told of how she had been in Norway, having been guided there to preach Jesus to multitudes, who flocked to hear, through an interpreter, the word of life from the lips of a frail woman. The strong man wiped the tears from his face when she spoke of their loved wives, mothers, and daughters, who, though separated by the mighty ocean, remembered them in their prayers. The pastor thanked God for this visit, and added, "The Lord will work by whom He will work, even by this feeble handmaiden, for the salvation of souls."

The writer happens to have an old notebook of a young lady, to whom the ministry of Rebecca Collins was greatly blessed. As perfect strangers they met, for

the first time, in a very small mid-week "Friends'" Meeting. In the course of Rebecca Collins's sermon she was led to say that she believed that day was a time of renewed visitation from the Lord, and that to one who was present His call was going forth, "The Lord hath need of thee, the Lord hath need of *thee*"; that it was "a time for entering into covenant with Him. Now, now, not to-morrow. I do not know," she said, "to whom the call is, but the Lord knows, and their own heart knows, and that is enough. 'Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.'—*Isaiah* lx. 1. If faithful to the Lord's call and yielding to the baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire, such would be vessels sanctified and meet for the Master's use, would have His mark on their forehead, holiness unto the Lord. Such would be made a blessing, a sharp threshing instrument, for winning souls to Christ." As she spoke, the silent prayer of one hearer was, "O God, do anything with me, take anything from me, only have the dominion in my heart." The entry in the notebook goes on: "It was a very striking time. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word.' . . . I prayed that this might be one of the turning points of my life."

The next entry in the notebook refers to a meeting, held at the request of Rebecca Collins, in an old country Meeting-house. It is described as a very remarkable time. On the early morning of that day this young lady had been looking forward to the meeting, and earnestly praying that God would make it

a time of great blessing to herself and others, etc. She writes: "I recall two or three sentences which particularly struck me in the sermon. 'There are some in this company—I am persuaded of it—who with the dawning of this day prayed for an increase of holiness in their own soul, and for a blessing on this occasion. . . . Oh, these interceding ones, a blessing shall descend upon them. The fervent effectual prayer of a righteous man—or of a righteous woman—availeth much.' She also spoke of the baptism of the Holy Ghost."

The last time the writer of this sketch saw Rebecca Collins was at a Bible Reading in London, when she was on the eve of returning to America. She had come to England, accompanied by two daughters, faithfully to fulfil there the service to which the Lord had called her, and when she spoke of the "immediate, direct, perceptible influence of the Holy Spirit," she spoke of what she had long experienced. This leading of the Spirit of God was manifestly shown in her Gospel Ministry as the few incidents just recorded serve to show. She knew that the state of every heart in a congregation was perfectly understood by her Lord, and that He could, in a literal sense, make her His messenger. To Him she looked in faith for this, as only those who yield themselves fully to the control of Christ can do; for as Andrew Murray truly says: "He that would have the leading of the Spirit must yield himself to have his life wholly possessed by the Spirit."

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